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Health reform had its first birthday last week. That provided Obama administration officials another occasion to tout the benefits of a law signed into law by their boss. The effort shouldn't be simply dismissed as just politics, however. People need information about the law and a reminder that it will help millions of Americans get coverage and protect them from insurance industry abuses.

Last week the U.S. Department of Agriculture (and Iowa's former governor) delivered the pro-reform message. Secretary Tom Vilsack held a media conference call about how the law specifically benefits rural America. He was joined by Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, also the former governor of a rural state.

Some of what they talked about amounted to recasting the law in a "rural" light. State-based exchanges where people can buy coverage and tax credits for small employers who help insure workers will benefit all Americans, no matter where they live. But other aspects of the new law are particularly relevant to rural areas and small communities.

One that hasn't gotten much attention: incentives for health providers to locate in rural areas.

One of the ironic fears about the health reform is that when millions more Americans get health insurance, there may not be enough professionals to treat them. Someone in rural Iowa may have insurance, but that doesn't do much good if he or she can't find a doctor within a reasonable distance.

Sebelius called the law a "historic investment" in health workers that will help train and support more than 16,000 new doctors and nurses. Many will receive incentives to practice in rural

communities. The law also continues investments in "community health centers." She also talked about increased reimbursements for doctors who treat Medicare patients. That is particularly important to Iowa.

Iowa Congressman Bruce Braley helped champion the provision that increases reimbursements for Iowa physicians. Iowa ranks second in the country for overall quality of care, according to a study by the Commonwealth Fund. Yet for years providers here have received less in reimbursements from Medicare than most other states. Iowa doctors have been penalized for practicing medicine that is conservative and high-quality.

The reform law means reimbursements have been increased by 10 percent for Iowa doctors. It provides an additional \$33 million to hospitals here, according to Braley.

The politics surrounding the new health care reform law will continue. Some politicians insist the law be repealed. Others will defend it by touting the benefits. Americans are left to sort through it all. But Iowans cannot forget what existed in this country for decades before reform: Millions of Americans without insurance, including those who died as a result. People with coverage who were forced to declare bankruptcy when medical bills weren't covered. Insurance companies canceling policies when people got sick.

Such scenarios will be rare when the new law is fully implemented. Companies will have to meet minimum coverage requirements, cannot just drop you from a policy and won't be able to charge you more because you have a pre-existing condition.

That will be the case whether you're living in rural or urban America.